More than 5,500 Greater Clevelanders died in war. Remember them. Honor them: Patrick M. McLaughlin

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Photographs of two fallen warriors during the 2014 rededication of the Greater Cleveland Veterans Memorial at the Fountain of Eternal Life downtown to add theirs and others' names to the memorial. Marine Cpl. Jeffrey A. Boskovitch is on the left. Boskovitch, 25, of North Royalton died in Iraq on August 1, 2005. Army Cpl. Brad A. Davis is on the right. Davis, 21, of Garfield Heights, died in Iraq on April 22, 2009. *(Photo by Cal Pusateri, used with permission)*

CLEVELAND -- Patriotic holidays come to my mind today.

On June 14, Flag Day and the birthday of the United States Army, I think of our flag and that for which it stands. Old Glory, ever changing over the years to keep pace with a growing nation, is America's greatest symbol. Those "broad stripes and bright stars" are recognized universally as a symbolic hallmark of our nation. A nation that attracts people the world over to come here and live with unprecedented freedoms.

On Veterans Day, we offer thanks to the men and women who have worn the uniforms, during times of war and peace, of the United States Army, the Marine Corps, the Air Force, the Navy, and the Coast Guard.

Veterans Day is prideful -- like the Fourth of July -- when we pay tribute to the men and women who have kept this nation free and independent. It is a day to express our national gratitude and rejoice that we have produced men and women who have, over the generations, and still today, answer when their nation calls.

Over the generations, our veterans have fought to create a nation, preserve a nation, fight the war to end all wars, and the war to save mankind from oppression and dictatorship. In the interstices of these monumental events, America's warriors have been asked to serve and fight in all manner of other wars, police actions, and undeclared circumstances where lives were lost.

Men and women in uniform have never been able to pick their wars — they go where "we the people" tell them to go.

And because they go, for those that do not come home, there is Memorial Day.

Patrick M. McLaughlin, president of the Greater Cleveland Veterans Memorial, walks past the memorial site in downtown Cleveland in a May 29, 2014 file photo. (Marvin Fong / The Plain Dealer)

The day America sets aside to honor its war dead is Memorial Day. A day of solemn reflection, ceremonies at memorials and cemeteries -- a day when the soulful sound of taps is heard throughout the land. This day is the holiest of our patriotic holidays.

On Memorial Day, America memorializes and remembers those who have died in military service during times of war. Respectful Americans also recognize our Gold Star families, for they have borne the personal loss of a family member.

The citizens of Greater Cleveland, encompassing all of Cuyahoga County, understand what it is to go in harm's way when the nation calls. The names of 5,552 Greater Cleveland war casualties from the 115-year period of 1899 to 2014 (our last casualty) are enshrined on the Greater Cleveland Veterans Memorial. The names appear on bronze plaques around the Fountain of Eternal Life, Marshall Fredericks' majestic work symbolizing mankind rising from the ashes of war. Renowned sculptor Fredericks called the Memorial Fountain his "most momentous commission."

The names of Greater Cleveland's war dead from the Spanish-American War through and including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan comprise the 5,552 names. The names appear in alphabetical order by war. The names are equal, without rank or artificial priority of any kind -- one sacrifice equal to another; they each gave all. Greater Cleveland has served America well, and paid a heavy price.

The casualties range from a low of one in the war with Spain, and a high of 3,956 for World War II. The Vietnam War took 424 sons of this county. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have claimed 32 men and one woman.

A "Living Memorial" website at www.clevelandvetsmemorial.org includes a searchable Honor Roll containing the 5,552 names. The website invites all to enter and learn about those who served and died.

Greater Cleveland and America owe a solemn obligation to these fallen patriots to ensure that we and the generations to come not forget who they are and what they did. They gave all for Duty, Honor, Country. Honor Them.

A Vietnam veteran, former U.S. Attorney Patrick M. McLaughlin is president of the Greater Cleveland Veterans Memorial Inc. (GCVM), a 501(c)(3) organization that rededicated the Greater Cleveland Veterans Memorial in 2004 and again in 2014, adding names of Greater Cleveland war dead.